

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

OF THE

TOWN OF HAMILTON.

READ AND ACCEPTED IN TOWN MEETING, MARCH 8, 1859.

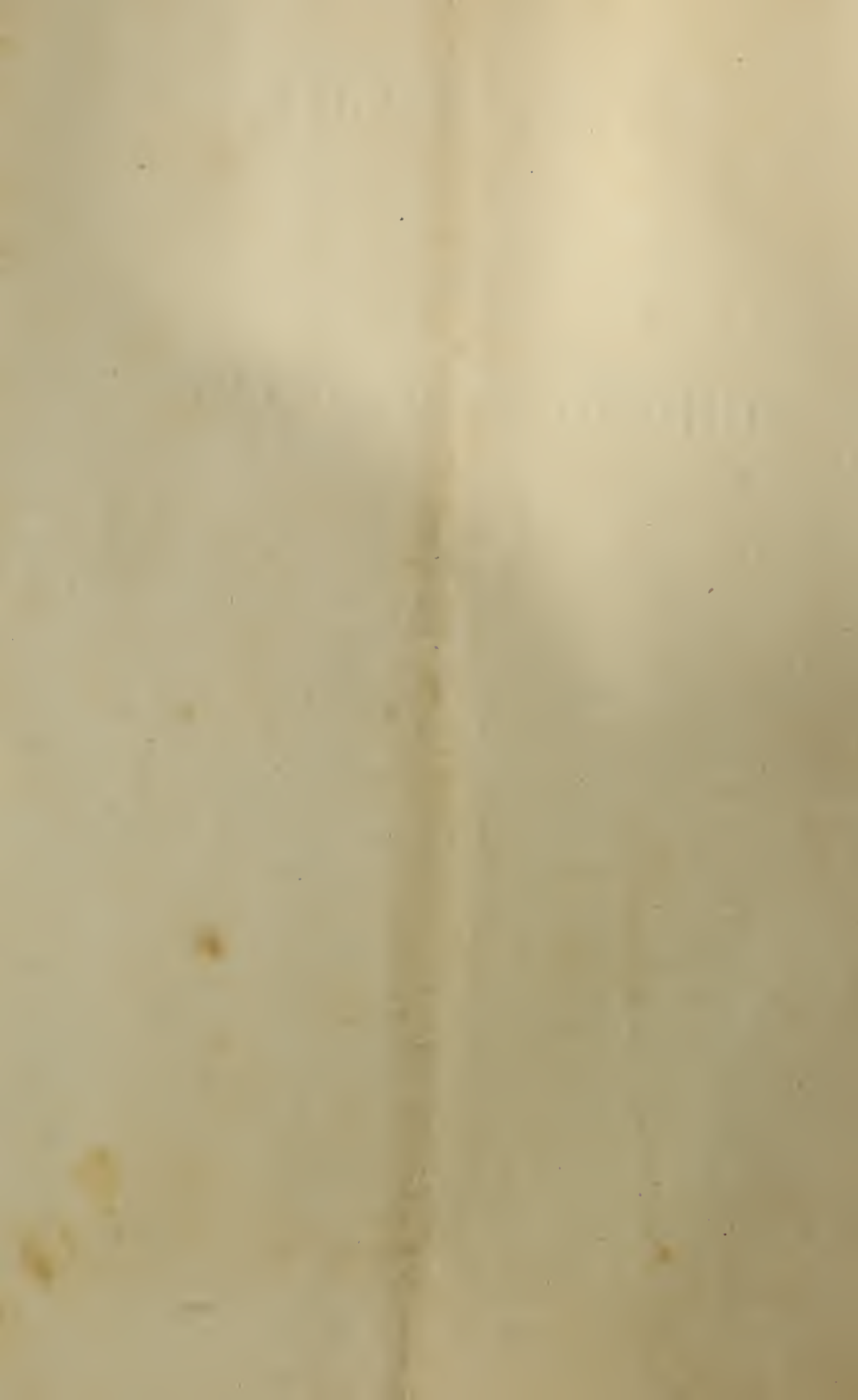
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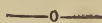
WILLIAM IVES AND GEORGE W. PEASE, PRINTERS.

OBSERVER OFFICE.

1859.



REPORT.



AT the close of their official year the School Committee offer the following

ANNUAL REPORT.

At the last Annual Meeting, the Town voted that the School Committee should select and contract with the Teachers for the Schools, and make such other arrangements and regulations as in their judgment would best promote its educational interests. With these additional responsibilities they entered upon the duties of their office, and with what results will appear in the sequel.

At the first regular meeting of the Board to make arrangements for the year, it was voted unanimously to employ female teachers for the year, to fix their salaries at five dollars per week, and consequently to have thirty weeks of schooling in each district. It was also voted to have three school terms,—the first to begin the second Monday in May and continue ten weeks; the second to begin the last Monday in September and continue eight weeks; and the third to begin the first Monday after the annual Thanksgiving and continue twelve weeks. To these arrangements they have adhered. Believing that the most important part of their duty was the selection of teachers, they determined to spare no pains in obtaining those who were fully competent to the successful management of the Schools, if it could be done with the limited means at their command. And as it was a controverted point whether or not the winter schools could go on successfully under a female teacher, they also wished more fully to test that question. It was also voted, (all other things being equal,) to employ Normal School graduates. Accordingly four teachers were selected who were graduates of the Normal School at Salem. Their examination was satisfactory, at which they exhibited a capacity and a maturity of character that gave promise of success, and confident expectations were entertained by your Committee that they were fully adequate to the requirements demanded of

them. They entered upon their duties, and at once proved themselves to be able to discharge them successfully; and your Committee felt no doubt that the results of their efforts would be highly satisfactory. But three of them resigned at the end of the summer term—two of them obtaining situations at much higher wages than they received here. It was also evident that their notions ranged somewhat above a situation in our schools. The rule to select only Normal School teachers was rescinded, and three more were selected—two of whom were not educated at Normal Schools, and your Committee have had no reason to regret it.

The first set of teachers did not consider themselves, by their engagement, under obligations to be in school on Wednesday afternoons; and it being contrary to the custom of most places, and not being mentioned to them when they engaged, that it would be required, it was decided to have no school, and so have our practice conform to that of other towns.

The Committee have conformed to the requirements of law and procured school-books for all who desired to obtain them, and have furnished them to the scholars at the wholesale prices.

With the above outline of the transactions of your Committee, the detailed condition of the several Schools will now be given.

EAST DISTRICT.—*Summer Term.*—*Miss Rebecca B. Manning, of Salem, Teacher.*

Whole number of Scholars, 15. Average attendance, 11.

To say that the teacher accomplished all that one could with the material she had to deal with, gives but a faint idea of her ability to conduct a school. Possessed of a fine mind, highly educated and accomplished, with a large share of native good sense, and excellent tact in performing the practical duties of the school room, she certainly was fitted for a position of more extended usefulness, than a baker's dozen of Primary School children. Nevertheless she worked faithfully and perseveringly and made a very perceptible impression upon her little charge, and commended herself to the high and just consideration of the Committee.

Fall and Winter Terms.—*Miss Mary J. Goodhue, of Essex, Teacher.*

Whole number of scholars 27. Average 19. Number over 15 years of age 7.

Miss Goodhue was a worthy successor of Miss Manning. Her staid and quiet manner, and the regular and systematic arrangements in her school enabled her to go through the exercises of the day with clock

work regularity. She has a happy faculty of governing a school well without any apparent bustle or effort. Her method of instructing was well adapted to the condition and character of her school, and was attended by its very general improvement. The examination was well attended and satisfactory. There is so great a variety of age and attainment in this school, and consequently so many classes, as to make a detailed description of each of them almost equivalent to a description of each scholar individually. Whenever this school has been visited by any member of the committee they have been favorably impressed with its general appearance, with the respectful manner of the pupils, especially the older ones, towards the teacher and themselves. There have been six young men attending this school during the winter term, between the ages of fifteen and twenty, at the age supposed by many to be so refractory as to be uncontrollable by female influence and requiring a master's cudgel to keep them in their proper place. But let it be said to the credit of these young men that they have invariably shown a proper and manly respect for the authority of their Teacher in the school room, and their general conduct has been marked by a sense of propriety outside of it.

SOUTH DISTRICT.—Summer Term.—Miss Martha H. Gould, of South Danvers, Teacher.

Whole number of scholars, 46. Average, 36.

Miss Gould is a thoroughly accomplished and excellent teacher. The school was doing finely under her administration, but a "louder call" deprived us of her services for more than one term. The school at the various times when visited by the committee showed the government to be good and the instruction systematic and thorough. The attendance was very punctual and regular, a good degree of interest was excited in the exercises, and the progress was very commendable.

Fall and Winter Terms—Miss Mary Colesworthy, of Chelsea, Teacher.

Whole number of scholars, 47. Average attendance, 21, or about 45 per cent.

Here were Miss Colesworthy's first efforts at teaching. She came to us well recommended by the faculty of the Normal School at Salem as a thorough scholar, of good mental endowments, with evident capacity or aptness to teach. Her examination and subsequent efforts fully sustained this recommendation. She did not, at first or afterwards, make a favorable impression upon the many in the District who regard external appearances of greater value than intrinsic merit and worth.

And instead of receiving as she ought their countenance and support, or what would have been its equivalent, their respectful silence, they set up a senseless croaking whose noxious influence entered the school room and contaminated the weaker heads there so as to lead them to suppose, that, like their worthy prototypes, whose puerile jargon was to change customs and laws, they too could put on airs and disregard the wholesome restraints of the school room with impunity.

When Miss Colesworthy commenced teaching here it took her some little time, (as it does all beginners), to get used to the harness, but she very soon surmounted the difficulties that arise from a want of experience, and did good service, as the improvement that her pupils made who were regular in the attendance, abundantly proves. The school was visited frequently by the committee, and always found to be in a wholesome condition, both as regards the order and the instruction.

The classes were well trained and bore examination well, and had it not been for the irregular attendance of pupils and the wagging of endless tongues, the school would have made respectable progress towards that condition of excellence which the friends of education so much desire. The school was kept 95 days, but the average attendance was but 40 days. And more than one-half of the scholars were not present even that length of time, while only one-fourth of them attended more than 60 days. It is a proper subject of inquiry why the privileges of education have been so grossly neglected. There has been no prevailing disease to prevent children from attending school. Indeed at almost any time as many children could be counted in the street as in the school. Was the trouble in the teacher? If so, what was it? Was it that she was incompetent to instruct them? One half of them can scarcely read fluently the most simple sentences, or pronounce the long words and technical terms that belong to the first elements of the different branches of study that was pursued by them. Did she fail to give the proper and necessary instruction the pupils required and should receive? Some complaints were made on this score by the larger scholars, while at the same time the teacher felt compelled to apologize to the Committee for showing them so much, thinking that they were relying more upon *her* than *themselves*. Was the government at fault? That was the cry at first, but afterward, as the saying is, the cry came from the other corner of the mouth, and rather than obey some preferred to leave. No justifiable reasons are apparent from the management of the teacher. But how is it with the parents of the children, and the children themselves? Meet a child in the street and ask him why he

does not go to school and four times in five he will tell you, because I don't want to. Ask the parents why they don't send their children to school, and the majority of them will tell you that they guess that the school isn't doing much, and the children don't care much about going, and on the whole they think they are about as well off to stay at home. Ask them what makes them think that the school isn't doing much, and the most rational answer that you will get will be, that the school is kept by a female, and no woman is fit to keep a winter school. The truth seems to be that most of the children who are so irregular and tardy at school are under no parental authority, and go or stay just as they please.

NORTH DISTRICT.—*Summer Term.*—*Miss Emma C. Sawyer, of Salem, Teacher.*

Whole Number of Scholars, 42. Average Attendance, 33.

Miss Sawyer was a finished specimen of a good teacher. Strong in will, dignified in her manner, and confident in her powers; she reigned supreme in the school-room. Her qualifications were of a high order; her tact for teaching was of the best, and the school felt her power in all her efforts to benefit it. All was accomplished by her that could reasonably be expected, and at the last visit of the committee they were highly gratified at the excellent condition in which they found the school.

Fall and Winter Terms.—*Miss Loann E. Soule, of Lewiston Falls, Maine, Teacher.*

Whole Number of Scholars, 48. Average Attendance, 31.

Miss Soule is a teacher of the better class, with remarkable power of creating and sustaining an interest in her pupils for study, and of securing their good will. She is a good disciplinarian, most thorough and accurate in teaching, zealous and faithful in the discharge of her duties, and her efforts have been attended with abundant success. The examination showed a marked advance in the condition of the school, and a detailed though hurried examination of the different classes showed that skillful hands had been at work. The Committee were particularly pleased with the accuracy and precision of all the exercises, and were well satisfied with the amount and thoroughness of the ground gone over. The attendance has been very regular during the year, and

the teachers have been well sustained by the parents, and the most satisfactory results have followed as a consequence.

WEST DISTRICT.—*Miss Sarah M. Foster, of Salem, Teacher.*

Whole Number in Summer, 28; Winter, 28. Average Attendance—in Summer, 23; in Winter, 15.

Miss Foster is a good scholar and has a large fund of book knowledge, is accurate and critical as a teacher and is unwearied in her exertions. Her scholarship was so high, and her disposition to work so good, that scarcely any doubts were entertained by the committee of her success. And the first term passed off well; the children accomplished as much as was expected of them, and nothing, save perhaps a little distant thunder, was heard to warn of the approaching gale that has swept through this district. Miss Foster was excellent in teaching but was less skilful as a disciplinarian than some others, and needed the united support of the district as well as the committee to sustain her. And had she had it, there is little doubt that the school would have made marked improvement. But for want of co-operation on the part of parents she was, during the fall and winter terms, shorn at least of half her usefulness. The children who attended school regularly and conducted properly, probably never did and never will do better in a district school. And it is not so clear "to a looker on in Venice," what the real root of the difficulty was. You hear individuals of the district talk and you are still more puzzled to account for the dissatisfaction. In all the visits of the committee they saw no radical defect, and the scholars always stood the test of examination well, and at the last visit the dozen who were present acquitted themselves well; their deportment was becoming, and their recitations creditable.

In summing up, it may be said, that the school in the EAST DISTRICT has met with fair success. It is doubtful if teachers for that school can be obtained, who, for a series of years, will average better than those of the past year. That district has had a fair test of what may be expected from female teachers.

In the NORTH DISTRICT, the School has been very highly successful. The teachers are of the first order, and public sentiment has generously sustained them. That district cannot hope for anything better under female administration.

The fortunes of the SOUTH SCHOOL have been mixed. The first teacher would undoubtedly have carried it through the year prosperously.

The second might have done so had she been sustained by public sentiment, but as it was she neither met with success nor made a failure. Improvement ought to be expected even under female management, if public sentiment favors it.

The WEST SCHOOL has met with but indifferent success, and mainly from a hostile public sentiment as it seems to one living out of the neighborhood. Something akin to the state of things during the last winter has existed there for five winters out of the last six; and in this time three male and three female teachers have been employed. The past offers the guarantee of the future. Whether males or females have charge of the school, something will depend upon the encouragement they receive from the district.

The aggregate amount of schooling has been 119 weeks—of this 80 weeks may be marked at or above the average of good schools; 39 weeks, for reasons above stated, have not accomplished as much as ought to be expected by those who support them.

Our Schools are all backward; very few ripe scholars go out from them, and the inquiry is made, what can be done to benefit them. Clearly nothing, except to improve our present system. No other system than that of district schools can be established in this town, or need be. But to have them flourish, as they should, some reforms are needed.

And first, public sentiment needs to be in a more healthy condition. At present it is unhappily in a transition state. The idea of employing females to keep our winter schools has obtained but a recent footing, and very many, perhaps a majority, whose opinions have weight in school matters, do not favor it, and honestly think that it is an innovation not adapted to our situation. Others, and the number is very respectable, think that females will do as well as males, and as their services cost less, favor their employment. These two opinions must clash in this town until experience shall settle it, either for or against the employment of females. And the fact that these different opinions exist, is unfavorable, for, let whichever opinion prevail in the selection of teachers, it will be sure to have the other opposed just in proportion as a teacher falls below a number one mark. Public opinion is a potent engine both for evil and good, and especially so in school affairs, and every one should see to it that his opinions are well founded before he expresses them, for no one can be justified in expressing a crude opinion in regard to a teacher or a school, when he knows such opinion will have an injurious effect. The true way for one who is dissatisfied with a school

would seem to be, either to sustain it or else be silent until the proper time to remove the difficulty arrives, and then act; that is, if he is friendly to the school and wishes to see it prosper. In so doing he will do nothing to the injury of the school.

Another reform that is needed, and that of much greater importance than a healthy public sentiment, and fortunately about which there can be but one opinion, is a more regular attendance. Irregular attendance is the greatest obstacle to the gradual elevation of our schools that they have to contend with, and no other excellence can compensate for it. There can be no very perceptible advance in scholarship, nor can the order and discipline of the school be kept up, nor can there be much interest created and sustained in the studies and exercises of the school, if the children are to be absent from their place a large proportion of the time. Nor are the delinquents the only sufferers; "if one member suffers the whole body suffers with it." The time that the irregular scholar spends in school does not benefit him to that degree, by a large discount, that the same would do if it was spent in constant attendance. Because he can have no system by which he may advance step by step regularly, and his interruptions destroy the attention and interest that constant application produces. A desire for learning is, with most minds, incidental to a constant and continued pursuit of the same, while very few children will retain an interest in their studies who are subjected to frequent interruptions.

It is to be hoped that the ensuing year will mark a great advance in the prosperity and condition of our schools; that the committees will be faithful and efficiently discharge their duties; that able and practical teachers and none others will be employed; that parents and others who have the charge of the young will make every effort to secure their constant attendance upon the means of instruction; and that all will lend their influence in every possible manner, to encourage and promote this great public interest. And let all who are of the proper age to profit by the advantages of our common schools, be stimulated to improve these golden opportunities, and clutch the prize of inestimable worth—a cultivated intelligence and a refined moral sentiment.

DANIEL E. SAFFORD, }
 ALLEN W. DODGE, } *School Committee.*
 D. S. ALLEN, }

March 8, 1859.

